



Night Train: New and Selected Stories

Thom Jones , Amy Bloom (Introduction)

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A posthumous and definitive collection of new and selected stories by "virtuoso of the short story" (*Esquire*) and National Book Award finalist Thom Jones

"Jones was an oracle . . . It's impossible not to marvel at the urgency of these stories." --*Wall Street Journal*

This scorching collection from award-winning author Thom Jones features his best new short fiction alongside a selection of outstanding stories from three previous books. Jones's stories are full of high-octane, prose-drunk entertainment. His characters are grifters and drifters, rogues and ne'er-do-wells, would-be do-gooders whose human frailties usually get the better of them. Some are lovable, others are not, but each has an indelible and irresistible voice. They include Vietnam soldiers, amateur boxers, devoted doctors, strung-out advertising writers, pill poppers and veterans of the psych ward, and an unforgettable adolescent DJ radio host, among others.

The stories here are excursions into a unique world that veers between abject desperation and fleeting transcendence. Perhaps no other writer in recent memory could encapsulate in such short spaces the profound and the devastating, the poignant and the hallucinatory, with such an exquisite balance of darkness and light. Jones's fiction reveals again and again the resilience and grace of characters who refuse to succumb. In stories that can at once delight us with their wicked humor and sting us with their affecting pathos, *Night Train* perfectly captures the essence of this iconic American master, showcasing in a single collection the breadth of power of his inimitable fiction.

Night Train: New and Selected Stories Details

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Lee says

Not so sure about one or two of the newer stories, but seeing as I'd give it six stars I can easily knock one off.

Luis Cuesta says

I received this book as a Goodreads giveaway. I think this collection condenses his literary output into an accessible volume with some standout stories written by Thom Jones . It is also worth to mention the stunning introduction by Amy Bloom that helps the reader to understand better the connections between the author personal life and his work.

Arranged in roughly chronological order, most of my favorites Jones's stories are here. What keeps drawing me into Jones's stories is the precision of his language, specially his mastery of 60s and 70s American idiom. I particularly prefer his early work where he clearly knew that the short story has to present a bang rather than build up to it, as the novel does. My favorite is "The Pugilist at Rest", from 1993, about a US marine's experience, first at bootcamp, then in Vietnam, then with PTSD, where Thom Jones explores what it feels like to be afflicted with strange or terminal conditions, as well as with anger and rage.

Art says

"... literary cocktails ..." — The New York Times Book Review

"... the eccentrics we might find in a lyric by Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen or Tom Waits." — Salon

Thom Jones displays a "knack for unnerving cheer in the face of catastrophe," writes Amy Bloom.

Although I liked a few of the stories here, many of the others hit me as too rude, too crude. Thom Jones took me on a zigzag roller coaster ride, from hopeless to hopeful.

The collection includes a couple dozen stories with half a dozen new ones. Many of the stories first appeared, sometimes in different form, in such publications as Harper's, The New Yorker and Playboy.

This anthology put Thom Jones on my radar. First published in his mid-forties, the National Book Award named him as a finalist in ninety-three. During the nineties, four of his stories appeared in The Best American Short Stories annual. And one of them published in The Best American Short Stories of the Century. He grew up in Aurora, two Metra stops beyond where my sister lives.

Although I found the collection uneven, I liked these:

"Diary of My Health"

A thoroughly tongue-in-cheek ten-month diary of episodes. The funniest story in the collection.

“All Along the Watchtower”

Clifford Grimes works for the City of Chicago as a graveyard-shift bridge tender on Cermak Road. Can a reformed bad guy transform into a do-gooder doing well with this rough crowd?

“Way Down Deep in the Jungle”

Dr Koestler, a loner from New Zealand, preferred his own company to that of others after long days in Zaire. He liked his baboon, an absurd animal. The native Africans laughed and fell to the ground as a drunken pet baboon imitated the doctor smoking cigarettes and sitting on a toilet. At one point, the doctor turns on a shortwave radio for music and hears “Red House” by Jimi Hendrix. After taking another hit off a second joint, the doctor plays air guitar. In time, Koestler feels at one with the jungle. The story published in an edition of The Best American Short Stories.

“Tarantula”

Lulu, a tarantula, made a statement. The hairy spider established a darker aspect of Hammermeister, the only Caucasian in his Detroit neighborhood. Unable to bring a school under control, he got fired from his job as principal. The story won an O Henry prize.

“I Want to Live”

Mrs Wilson, with her ovaries and uterus gone, gets a difficult diagnosis of her abdomen, where adhesions tangle beyond the skill of a surgeon. Visitors come in droves. Flowers. Intrusions at all hours. “Go away,” she shrieks in desperation. “Leave me alone,” she cries, (which also can serve as a modern rallying cry for many of us as we rebel against Big Tech.) This story appeared in The Best American Short Stories of the Century.

Linda Redding says

Wow!

Lucy says

Well written but totally depressing. A collection of short stories populated by Marines, boxers, doctors in Africa, epileptics, and people with a variety of mental and physical afflictions - some characters who meet more than one of these descriptions. The one consistent thing is that none of these characters is likable. And not one single story in this book has a happy ending. It almost makes you want to throw yourself in front of a train, a night train.
